# A Man for the Ages

*A Story of the Builders of Democracy*

**By Irving Bacheller**



CHAPTER XXIIII—Continued.

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"The mystery of woman can not be solved by intellectual processes," the young man remarked. "Observation is the only help and mine has been mostly telescopic. We have managed to keep ourselves separated by a great distance even when we were near each other. It has been like looking at a star with a very limited parallax. It's a joy to be able to see you with the naked eye."

"You will have little to look at on this holiday but me and the prairies," said Bim.

"I think the prairies will be neglected. I shall wear my cavalry uniform and try to get a pair of the best horses in Chicago for the trip."

"Then you would have to get mine. I have a handsome pair of black young horses from Ohio—real high steppers. It is to be my party. You will have to take what comes and make the best of it."

The day of their journey arrived—a warm, bright, cloudless day in September, 1841. The long story of those years of separation was told as they rode along. Biggs had been killed in a drunken brawl at Alton. Davis had gone to the far West—a thoroughly discredited man. Henry Brimstead had got his new plow on the market and was prospering beyond all his hopes. Eli had become a merchant of unusual ability and vision. His square dealing and good sense had done much to break down prejudice against the Jews in the democracy of the West. Samson Traylor was getting wealth and a reputation for good sense. He had made the plan on which the business had developed. He had proved himself a wise and far-seeing man. Sarah's friends had been out in Springfield for a visit. They had invested money in the business. Her brother had decided to bring his family West and settle in Sangamon county.

Agents of the store were traveling in Wisconsin, Illinois and Indiana selling its goods to country dealers. They carried with them the progressive and enlightened spirit of the city and the news. Everywhere they insisted upon a high standard of honesty in business. A man who had no respect for his contract was struck off the list. They spread the everyday religion of the counting room. They were a welcome unifying and civilizing force in the middle country.

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The lovers stopped in a grove at noon and fed their horses and Harry built a fire and made a broach of green sticks on which he broiled beefsteak.

A letter from Harry to Sarah Traylor tells of the beauty of the day.

"It was my great day of fulfillment, all the dearer because I had come back to health and youth and beloved scenes out of those years shadowed with loneliness and despair," he writes. "The best part of it, I assure you, was the face I loved and that musical voice ringing like a bell in merry laughter and in the songs which had stirred my heart in the days of its tender youth. You—the dear and gentle mother of my later boyhood—are entitled to know of my happiness when I heard that voice tell me in its sweeter tone of the love which has endured through all these years of stern trial. We talked of our plans as we sat among the ferns and mosses in the cool shade sweetened by the incense of burning fagots, over that repast to which we shall be returning often for refreshment in poorer days. We had thought of you and of the man so well beloved of you and us in all these plans. We shall live in Springfield so that we may be near you and him and our friend, Honest Abe."

It is a long letter presenting minute details in the history of that sentimental journey and allusion to matters which have no part in this record. Its substance being fully in the consciousness of the writer, he tenderly folds it up and returns it to the package—yellow and brittle and faded and having that curious fragrance of papers that have lain for scores of years in the gloom and silence of a locked mahogany drawer. So alive are these letters with the passion of youth in long forgotten years that the writer ties the old ribbon and returns them to their tomb with a feeling of sadness, finding a singular pathos in the contrast of their look and their contents. They are turning to dust, but the soul of them has gone into this little history.

The young man and woman mounted their horses and resumed their journey. It was after two o'clock. The Grand Prairie lay ahead of them. The settlement of Plain's End was twenty-one miles away on its farther side. They could just see its tall oak trees in the dim distance.

"We must hurry, if we get there before dark," said the girl. "Above all, we must be careful to keep our direction. Its easy to get lost down in the great prairie."

They heard a cat-bird singing in a near thicket as they left their camp. It reminded Bim of her favorite ballad and she sang it with the spirit of old:

"My sweetheart, come along—
Don't you hear the glad song
As the notes of the nightingale flow?
Don't you hear the fond tale of the sweet nightingale
As she sings in the valleys below?
As she sings in the valleys below?"

They went on, shoulder-deep in the tall grass on the lower stretches of the prairie. Here and there it gave Harry the impression that he was swimming his horse in "noisy, vivid green water." They startled a herd of deer and a number of wild horses. When they lost sight of the woods at Plain's End the young man, with his cavalry training, was able to ride standing on his saddle until he had it located.

It reminded him of riding in the Everglades and he told of his adventures there as they went on, but very modestly. He said not a word of his heroic fight the day that he and sixty of his comrades were cut off and surrounded in the "land of the grassy waters." But Bim had heard the story from other lips.

Late in the afternoon the woods loomed in front of them, scarcely a mile off. Near the end of the prairie they came to a road which led them past the door of a lonely cabin. It seemed to be deserted, but its windows were clean and a faint column of smoke rose from its chimney. There were hollyhocks and sunflowers in its small and cleanly dooryard. A morning-glory vine had been trained around the windows.

"Broad creek is just beyond," said Bim. "I don't know how the crossing will be."

They came presently to the creek, unexpectedly swollen. A man stood on the farther shore with some seventy feet of deep and rapid water between him and the travelers.

"That man looks like Stephen Nuckles," said Harry.

"It is Stephen Nuckles," Bim answered.

"Howdy, Steve!" the young soldier called.

"Howdy, boy!" said the old minister. "That ar creek is b'lin' over. I reckon you'll have to swim the hosses."

They tried, but Bim's horse refused to go beyond good footing.

"You kin light at that ar house an' spend the night, but the folks have gone erway," the minister called.

"I guess you'll have to marry us right here and now," Harry proposed. "Night is coming and that house is our only refuge."

"Poor boy! There seems to be no escape for you!" Bim exclaimed with a sigh. "Do you really and honestly want to marry me? If there's any

"We'll Begin by Reading the Nineteenth Chapter of Matthew."

doubt about it I'll leave the horses with you and swim the creek. You could put them in the barn and swim with me or spend the night in the cabin."

"It's a cool evening and the creek is very wet," he answered. "I'm going to take this matter in my own hands."

He called to the minister. "Steve, this is the luckiest moment of my life and you are just the man of all others I would have chosen for its most important job. Can you stand right where you are and marry us?"

"You bet, I kin, suh," the minister answered. "I've often said I could marry any one half a mile erway if they would only talk as loud as I kin. I've got the good book right here in my pocket, suh. My ol' woman is comin'. She'll be hyah in a minute fer to witness the perceedin's."

Mrs. Nuckles made her appearance on the river bank in a short time.

Then the minister shouted: "We'll begin by readin' the nineteenth chapter of Matthew."

He shouted the chapter and the usual queries, knelt and prayed and pronounced them man and wife.

The young man and woman walked to the cabin and put their horses in

The Long Story Was Told as They Rode Along.

its barn, where they found an abundance of hay and oats. They rapped at the cabin door, but got no response. They lifted its latch and entered.

A table stood in the middle of the room, set for two. On its cover of spotless white linen were plates and cups and saucers and a big platter of roasted prairie chickens and a great frosted cake and preserves and jellies and potato salad and a pie and a bottle of currant wine. A clock was ticking on the shelf. There were live embers in the fireplace and wood in the box, and venison hanging in the chimney.

The young soldier looked about him and smiled.

"This is wonderful!" he exclaimed. "To whom are we indebted?"

"You don't think I'd bring you out here on the plains and marry you and not treat you well," Bim laughed. "I warned you that you'd have to take what came and that the hospitality would be simple."

"It's a noble and benevolent conspiracy that has turned this cabin into a paradise and brought all this happiness upon me," he said as he kissed her. "I thought it strange that Mr. Nuckles should be on hand at the right moment."

"The creek was a harder thing to manage!" she answered with a smile. "I told my messenger to see that the gate of the reservoir was opened at four o'clock. So, you see, you had to marry or swim. Now I've made a clean breast of it. I felt sure something would happen before you got back from Milwaukee. I was plum superstitious about it."

The young man shook with laughter and said: "You are the new woman born of the democracy of the West."

"I began to fear that I should be an old woman before I got to be Mrs. Needles."

"Whose house is this?" he asked in a moment.

"It is the home of Mr. and Mrs. Peter Lukins. Their land near Chicago is now used for a cattle yard and slaughterhouse and is paying them a good income. They moved here some time ago. He looks after the reservoir. Mrs. Lukins is a famous cook, as you will see. We can stay here as long as we want to. We shall find everything we need in the well, the chimney, the butt'ry and the cellar. And here is the wedding supper all ready for us and I as hungry as a bear."

"In the words of Mrs. Lukins 'it is very copasetic,' and I begin to feel that I have made some progress in the study of Bim Kelso. Come, let's have our supper."

"Not until you have broiled a piece of venison. It will take a lot of food to satisfy me. I'll get the cream and butter out of the well and make a pot of coffee. Hurry up, Harry, I'm starving."

Darkness fell upon the busy lovers and soon the firelight and the glow of many candles filled the homely cabin with flickering shadows and a soft, beautiful color.

"Supper is ready," she said, when the venison steak had been deposited on the platter.

"Bim, I love you not as most men love," he said as they stood a moment by the side of the table. "From the bottom of my heart I do respect you for your honor and good faith and when I think of that and of all you have suffered for my sake, I bow my head and ask God to make me worthy of such a helper."

They sat down to this unusual wedding feast, and as we leave them the windows of the little cabin fling their light far out upon the level plain; we hear the sound of merry laughter and of the tall grasses rustling and reeling joyously in the breeze. The moon in mid-heaven and the innumerable host around it seem to know what is passing on the edge of the Grand Prairie and to be well pleased. Surely there is nothing that finds a quicker echo in the great heart of the world than human happiness!

CHAPTER XXV.

**Being a Brief Memoir by the Honorable and Venerable Man Known in These Pages as Josiah Traylor, Who Saw the Great Procession of Events Between Andrew Jackson and Woodrow Wilson and Especially the Making and the End of Lincoln.**

Now, as I have done often sitting in the chimney corner at the day's end, I look back at my youth and manhood and tell, with one eye upon the clock, of those years of fulfillment in the progress of our beloved pilgrim. There are four and twenty of them that I shall try to review in as many minutes. At this distance I see only the high places—one looming above another like steps in a stairway.

The years of building and sentiment ended on the fourth of November, 1842, when he and Mary Todd were joined in marriage. Now, like one having taken note of the storm clouds, he strengthens the structure.

Mary tried to teach him fine manners. It was a difficult undertaking. Often, as might have been expected, she lost her patience. Mary was an excellent girl, but rather kindlesome and pragmatic. Like most of the prairie folk, for instance, Abe Lincoln had been accustomed to reach for the butter with his own knife, and to find rest in attitudes extremely indolent and unbecoming. He enjoyed sprawling on the floor in his shirt-sleeves and slippers with a pillow under his head and a book in his hand. He had a liking for ample accommodation, not fully satisfied by a bed or a lounge. Mary undertook to turn him into new ways and naturally there was irritation in the house, but I think they got along very well together for all that. Mary grew fond of him and proud of his great talents and was a devoted wife. For years she did the work of the house and bore him children. He milked the cow and took care of the horse when he was at home.

Annabel and I, having just been married, went with him to Washington on our wedding tour in 1847. He was taking his seat in congress that year. We were with him there when he met Webster. Lincoln was deeply impressed by the quiet dignity of the great man. We went together to hear Emerson lecture. It was a motley audience—business men, fashionable ladies and gentlemen, statesmen, politicians, women with their knitting and lion-hunters. The tall, awkward orator ascended the platform, took off his top-coat and drew a manuscript from his pocket. He had a narrow, sloping forehead, a prominent nose, gray eyes and a skin of singular transparency. His voice was rich and mellow, but not strong. Lincoln listened with rapt attention to his talk about Democracy. It was a memorable night. He spoke of it often. Such contact with the great spirits of that time, of which he studiously availed himself in Washington, was of great value to the statesman from Illinois. His experiences on the floor were in no way important to him, but since 1914 I have thought often of what he said there, regarding Polk's invasion of Mexico, unauthorized by congress as it was:

"The provision of the Constitution giving the war-making power to congress was dictated, as I understand it, by the following reasons: Kings had always been involving and impoverishing their people in wars, pretending generally that the good of the people was the object. This our convention understood to be the most oppressive of all kingly oppressions and they proposed to so frame the constitution that no man should hold the power of bringing this oppression upon us."

The next year he stumped Massachusetts for "Zach" Taylor and heard Gov. Seward deliver his remarkable speech on slavery, which contained this striking utterance:

"Congress has no power to inhibit any duty commanded by God on Mount Sinai or by His Son on the Mount of Olives."

(TO BE CONTINUED.)



## EXPLAINING LACK OF DETAIL

**Youthful Artist Had Excellent Reason for Leaving Out Characters in Her Illustration.**

A primary class in one of the grade schools was asked to illustrate a story that had been read to the little ones by the teacher. The story told of three children going to a wood in a goat wagon, and staying until the sun went down. Most of the pictures showed the goat with big horns pulling the wagon containing the children, and a sun going down behind a hill. One of the small girls in the class handed in a picture showing merely a hill and some grass.

"Why, what does your picture mean?" inquired the teacher. "Where are the goat and the children?"

"They have all gone home," replied Opal.

**History as She Is Quoted.**

The Woman was shopping in a State street department store. She wanted a hat. There were two others at the counter, shopping, without wanting anything. The tall, thin one lifted a brown velvet tricorn shape to the light.

"Pretty, ain't it?" she asked her portly friend, who carried a book under her arm.

"Yes, very," answered the friend; "reminds me of Napoleon."

"Napoleon?" queried the tall one, whose fluffy hair covered a vacuum. "How and when Napoleon?"

"Oh," answered she of the book, with superior disdain. "Don't you know? Napoleon crossing the Delaware!"—Chicago Journal.

**Then the Fun Began.**

Voice (at the other end)—Is that you, darling?

Gouty Father—Er—yes.

Voice—Oh, good! How's the old boy's gout, my pet? I mean to say, if he still has it I'll come round tonight, but if he hasn't we'll go out to some show.

**Not So Catching.**

"I hear your father is ill."

"Yes, quite ill."

"Contagious disease?"

"I hope not; the doctor says its overwork."—Carnegie Puppet.

**Dry Goods.**

"Colonel, should a dry goods store sell soda water?"

"Yes, I guess it's dry enough."

Character is what you are; reputation is what you try to make people think you are.